



The Exceptionally Simple Theory of Sketching

Why do professional sketches look beautiful?

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Extended Edition

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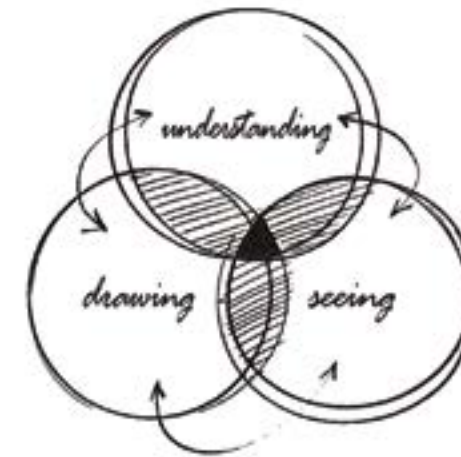
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The Why of Sketching

Draw like a professional and you will be a professional.

Some people make rough, fast, nonchalant sketches and they look brilliant. For others, it takes hours of blood, sweat and tears to produce drawings that are accurate yet still look unprofessional. The question is why?

As a lecturer in cognitive ergonomics at the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, I consider human reactions to visual information, and I also teach sketching. So I thought that if I could analyze and describe how our mind reacts to different aspects of handmade sketches, I would be able to teach drawing skills much more easily.



Sometimes I meet an 'old school' teacher of sketching whose main aim is to teach people to draw accurately. I am convinced that this traditional way of learning to draw is fundamentally wrong, because even if people learn to draw accurately, their drawings do not convince. That frustrates people and makes them avoid drawing altogether instead of practising their craft. Fear and uncertainty is then visible in all their work, and they fail to improve.

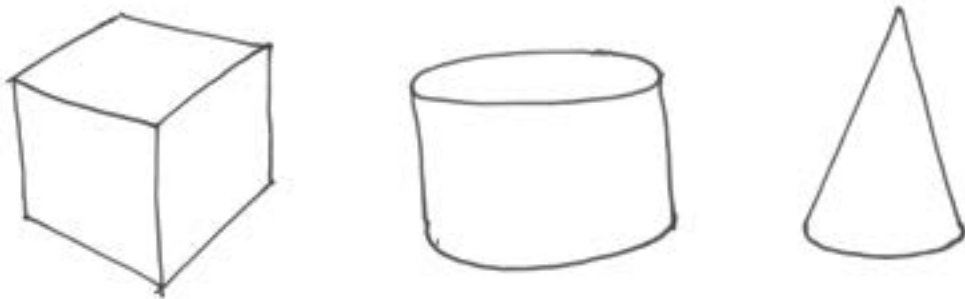
The problem is that when you draw slowly you concentrate a lot. As you draw the line your brain is checking its accuracy, continuously controlling the movement of your hand. The tension in the muscles in your hand changes because of the constant corrections. That is why you always end up with slightly crooked lines. The more you try to draw accurately, the less confident your lines will be.

But if you draw just slightly faster, there will be no time for minor corrections and the lines will look much smoother. They will express dynamism and confidence and look much better even if the lines are not exactly where they should be.

Single versus multiple lines

Your brain can project the perfect line in between.

If you look at professional handmade sketches, you will see that there are often multiple lines on top of one another. But if you use just a single line, all inaccuracies become very prominent.

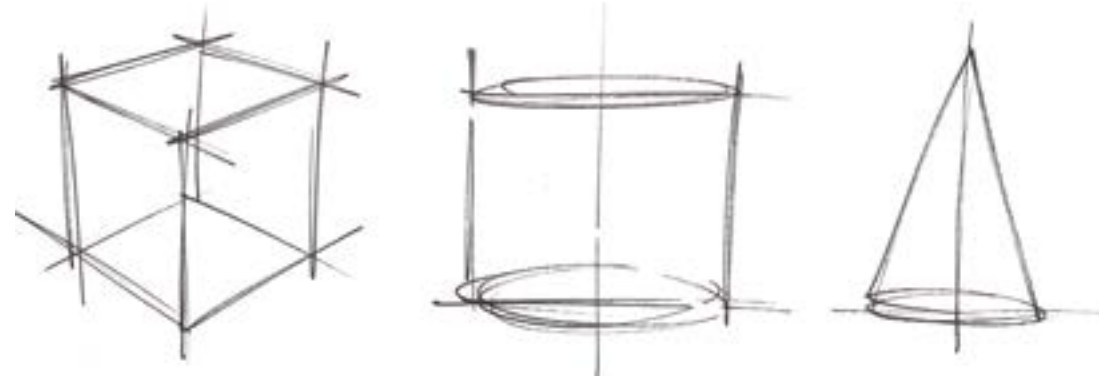


Single lines make the tiniest inaccuracy prominent.

When you use multiple lines, however, your brain will abstractly average the multiple lines and read the perfect one between them, even if it is not

there at all.

Just 2 or 3 lines at most are usually enough. More lines will only make your sketch look messy. Another common option is to use multiple thin lines and then highlight the best ones with a thicker pen. It is almost impossible to draw a good circle or ellipse in a freehand manner using only one single line.



With multiple lines, your brain reads the perfect average between them.

Single versus multiple lines

Perfect single lines.

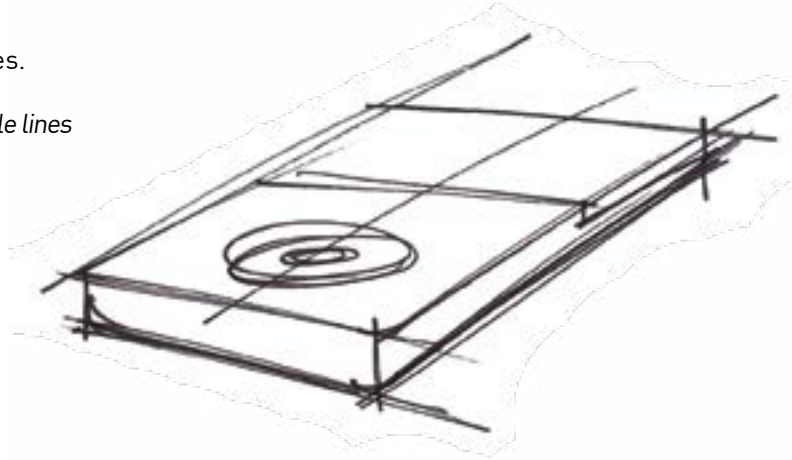
If you sketch very precise and geometrically shaped products like electronic flatscreen devices, there is no space for multiple lines along the fine edges. The sketch has to be executed perfectly with as many single lines as possible.

You can choose from the following options:

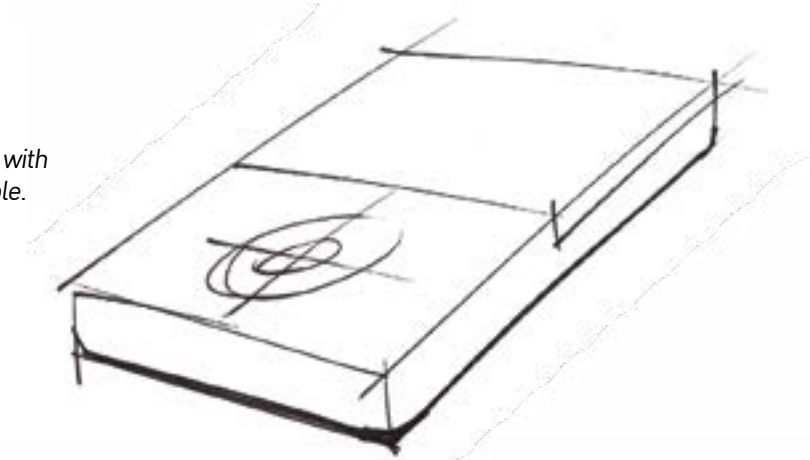
1. Practice a lot until you are confident you can draw the lines in the right place at once.
2. Try it a number of times and select the best result.
3. Sketch with a light pencil and trace over it with a pen.

4. Use rulers and templates.

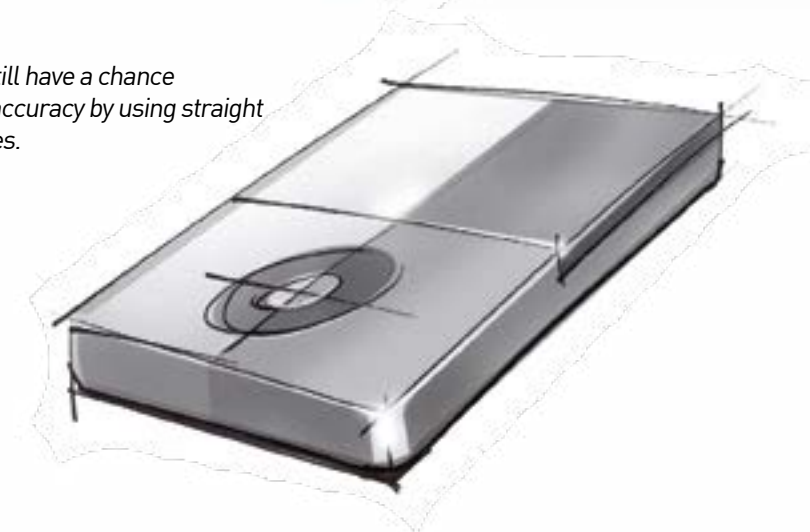
1) There is no place for multiple lines along the fine edges.



2) The drawing must be made with as many single lines as possible.



3) When you colour it in, you still have a chance to increase the perception of accuracy by using straight reflection lines in critical places.

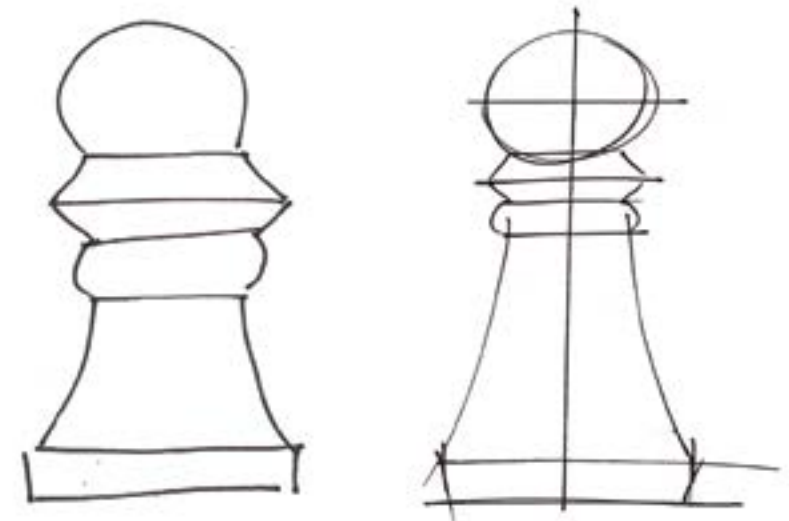


Construction lines Intelligent design.

Drawing is visual communication. It allows you to communicate important suggestions. Visible construction lines suggest that your sketch is the result of an intelligent creative process.

Construction lines tell the story of how the drawing was created. That is why a sketch with construction lines is much more interesting and meaningful than one without them.

These extra lines also help orientation as you start to draw. They hide minor inaccuracies and strengthen the illusion of accuracy even if your drawing is not perfect.



1) The first drawing doesn't communicate anything more than what you see.
2) Construction lines suggest that the second drawing is the result of an intelligent design process.

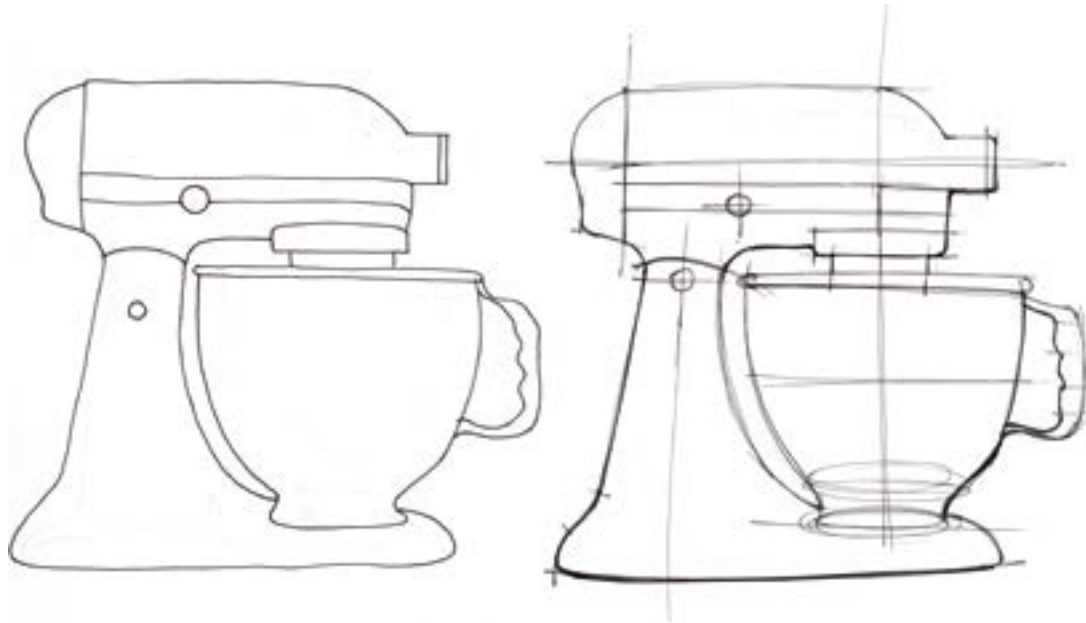
Pre-drawing

When tracing over a drawing, focus on dynamism and not on a perfect overlay.

It is not advisable to use pencil to make an initial outline drawing, or pre-drawing, and then trace over it later. Only drawing directly with a pen will teach you not to be afraid of making mistakes, and not to try to correct mistakes all the time.

Yet in some cases, when you draw very complex or very fine geometric objects, you cannot avoid using a pencil at first.

If you make a pre-drawing, always use a very thin and light pencil. And when you trace over in with the pen, concentrate more on drawing dynamic lines and less on following the underlying lines accurately. There is usually no problem at all if the trace line has a dynamic and confident character but lies a little off the original.



1) Single line tracing. 2) Sketch line tracing.

If your traced line is drawn too slowly, it will look crooked and express uncertainty, even if it is exactly in the right position. You should also trace over some construction lines and double or triple some lines, because the traced drawing must look like an intelligent sketch rather than a sterile copy that lacks all human character.

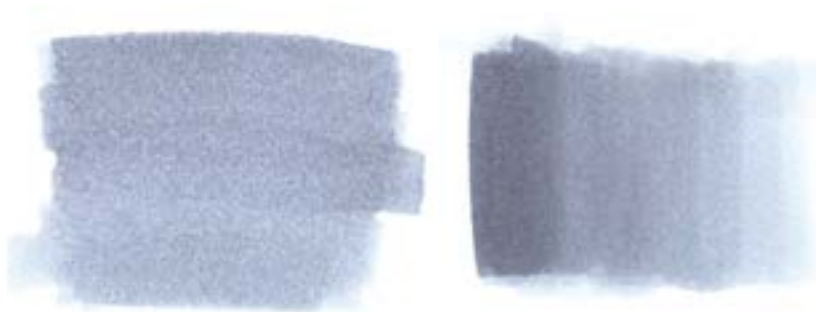


1) With single lines, the drawing looks like part of a comic strip. 2) With 'sketch' lines, the drawing looks more like an intelligent design.

Marker techniques

How to use markers.

Marker techniques are the easiest way to 'fill line drawings with material'. There are only a few things you need to know about the techniques.

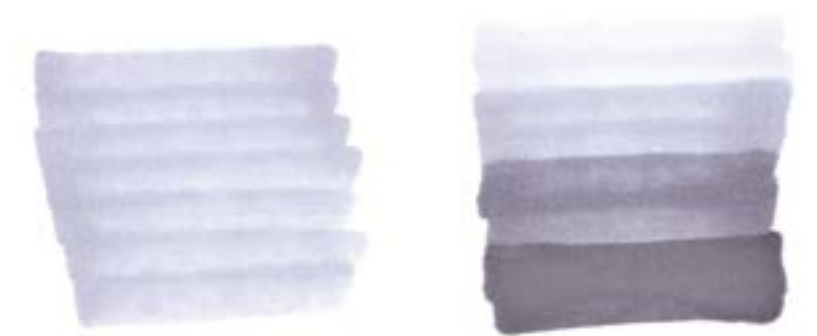


If you want an area with perfectly consistent colour, you have to 'paint' the surface over and over until the ink makes the paper equally wet everywhere. You have to concentrate on keeping the surface wet and go back to places where it has dried until the whole surface is covered. Then you stop and let the paper dry. If you do so, you will get a surface of perfectly consistent colour. It is easier if you use special marker paper because it is impregnated and therefore does not suck the ink out of the marker like conventional paper does. Besides, it dries much faster.

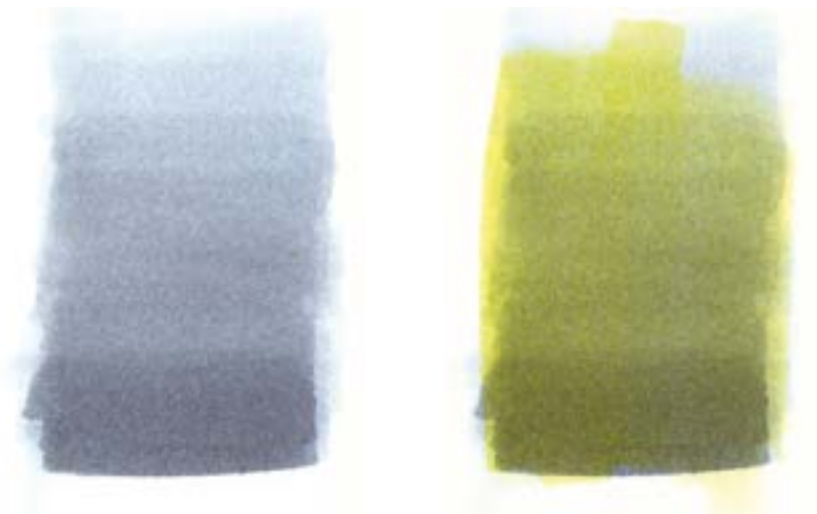
When the paper is wet you can pick a darker tone and make some areas darker if you wish. Then you can pick the lighter tone again and 'paint' back and forth over the line between the light and dark areas. If you keep the paper wet and do it carefully, you can make the transition between light and dark very smooth. When finished, you simply let the paper dry.

Another technique is to 'draw' with stripes. You just colour without caring about the fact that you see the stripes. If you do this well, your drawing will have a good structure.

When a layer is dry, you can start a second, darker layer. If you use the same colour, it will be just slightly darker, and then you can let it dry again. If you want to make it even darker, a third layer with the same colour usually doesn't have enough effect. You need a slightly darker tone for each following layer until you achieve the desired result.



It is also possible to make more grey layers for the transitions and cover it all in the end with a colour. Then you can make different tones of a colour with only one colour marker.



Good lighting concepts

The composition of reflections.

For a good sketch, it is important to determine the right amount and position of reflections. You have to decide how wide the light and dark reflections should be, and where these reflections should begin and end. Light and shadow must be balanced. That means balancing the specific proportions that support the sense of three dimensions in the most effective manner. Here are some good and bad examples.

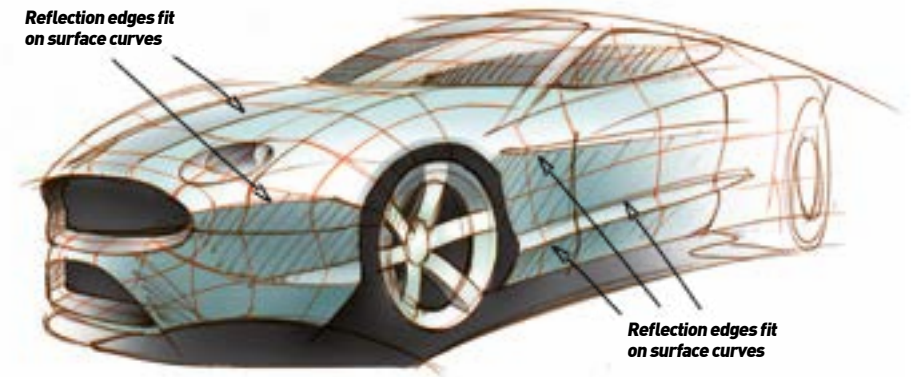


- 1) This is a good composition of reflections. It is asymmetric, so there is a logical light and shadow side. The widths of the different areas are well balanced.
- 2) Here you can see large, monotone, grey surfaces with reflections that are much too sharp and much too thin.
- 3) If the light is in the middle, it is difficult to understand what happens. Both sides are shadow sides, and it is unnaturally symmetric.

Good lighting concepts

Reflections on complex surfaces.

The point is not using the technique, but to figure out where the reflection lines should be. It actually shouldn't be called marker technique but, instead, lighting technique. If you can imagine what a 3D wire-frame would look like, it is easy to 'design' a nice composition of light and dark areas and smooth transitions by following some lines of the wire-frame.



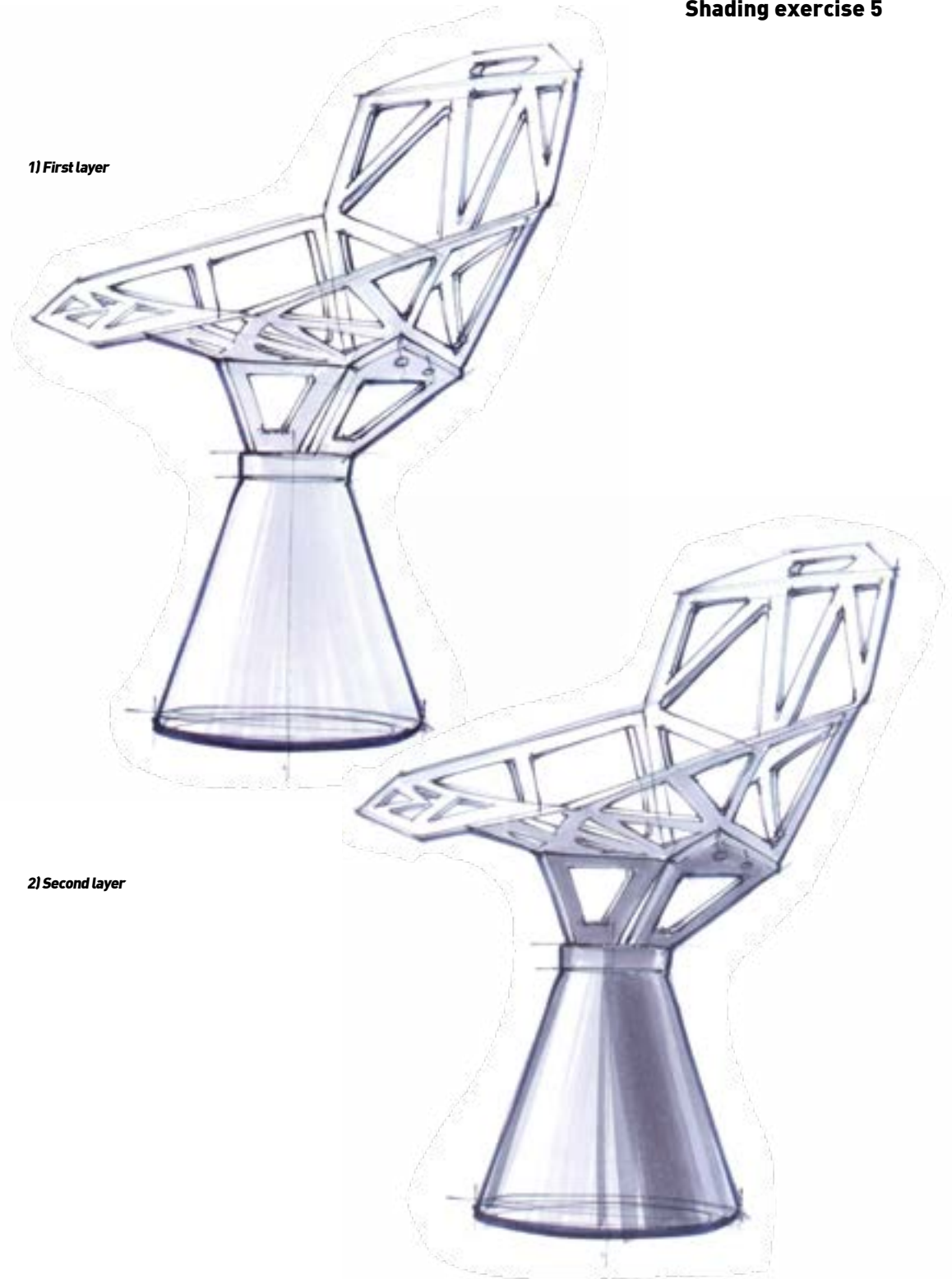
When a photographer wants to take some beautiful shots of a car, he has to build up a whole scene with light and dark boards to create the desired lighting effect on the surface of the car. The advantage of sketching is that you can simply put the lines wherever you need them. From that point of view, sketching is even much better than computer rendering, where you have to model the same surrounding scene that the photographer would use to get the same beautiful reflections.





1) First layer

2) Second layer



Dynamic tracing and shading exercises

Instructions.

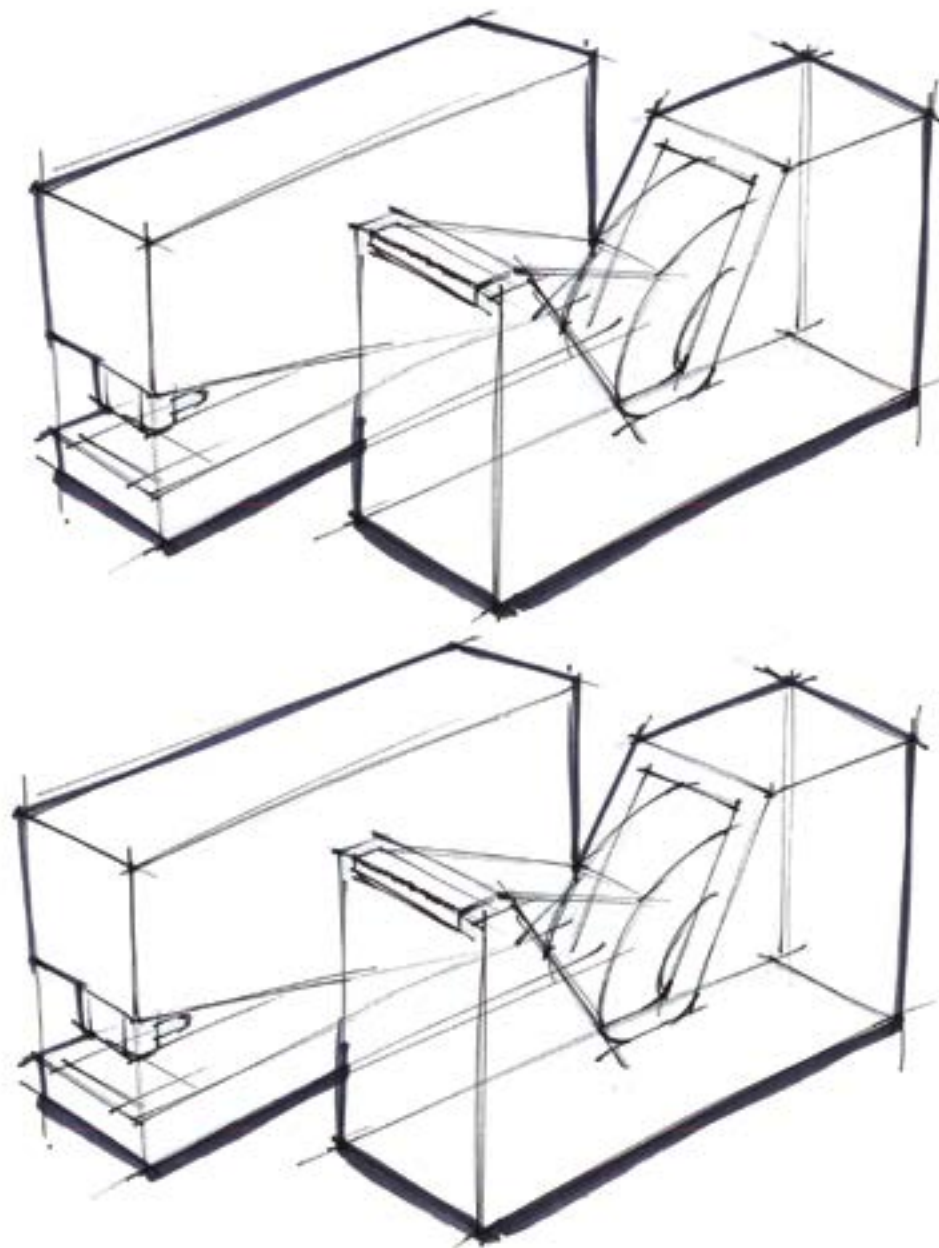
The following exercises will help you to improve your sketching skills. You will be able to sketch with dynamic, confident lines and create professional shadings.

Copy the sheets on a copier, so when you are not satisfied with your first results, you can try again and practice as much as you want. If you use a copier, I highly recommend you use special marker paper, because the back side of that kind of paper is impregnated. You will get better results while using less of your marker's ink. You can buy marker paper in most artist's shops or online. Make sure you print on the front side of the marker paper, because due to the special coating, your markers will not work on the back side.

The light line drawings are intended to be traced over to practice drawing with dynamic, confident lines. You can watch a free 10-minute video tutorial on www.methodofsketching.com to understand exactly how. While practicing, pay attention to the next six sketching principles:



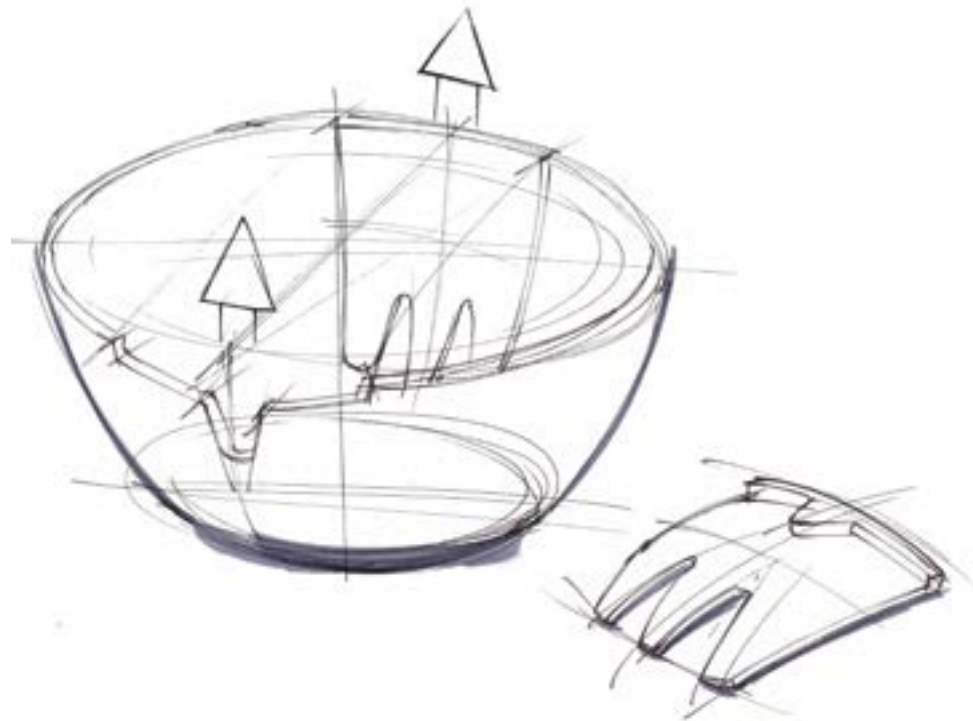
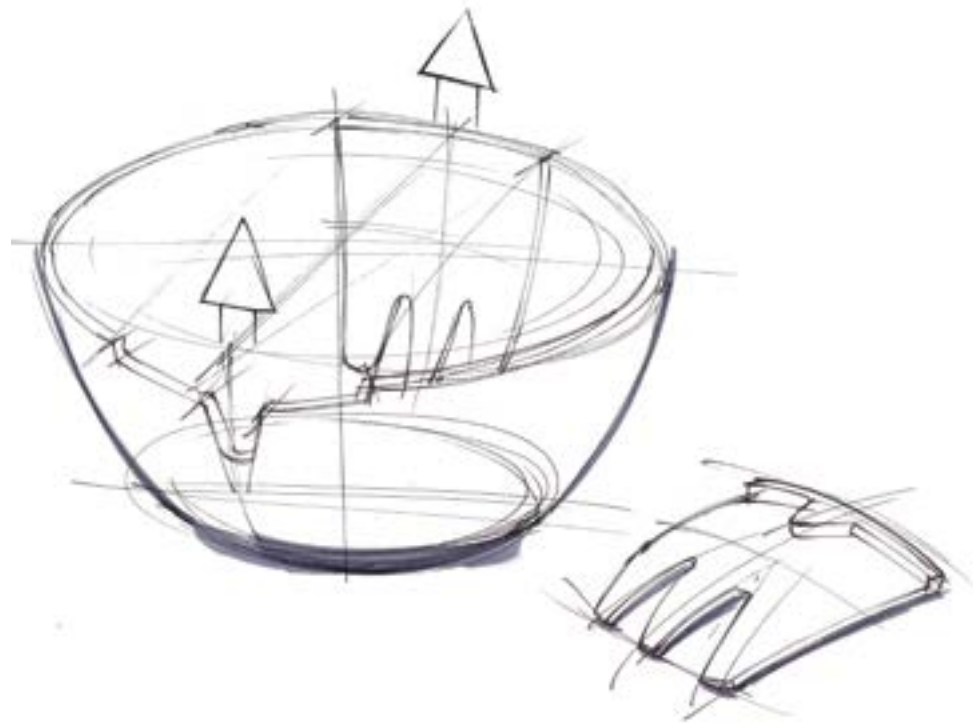
1. While tracing the lines, focus more on dynamism and less on trying to follow the original lines perfectly. If you focus too much on following the underlying lines, the movement of your hand will slow down. The tiny muscle movements that you make to keep your lines on the perfect track will be imprinted in all your drawings, and it will give you uncertain and crooked lines. That is exactly the opposite of what you want to see. If some of your lines are a few millimetres off compared to the original, but drawn with sufficient dynamism, your drawing will still be beautiful.
2. Do not try to draw complex curves with one continuous line but build up all drawings using a rhythmic structure of very simple segments. You will see that all the following drawings can be created by connecting simple straight lines, curves, circles, and ovals. Where these segments are connecting and need rounded corners, add those corners in a second phase.
3. Adjust the lines and curves to your hand anatomy. Do not try to force your hand into uncomfortable movements. Turn the paper around for each line segment until the lines or curves are positioned to your hand, not the other way around. You will see that if you turn the paper into the perfect position for your hand, your lines and curves will be exactly in the right place, even if you draw them with your eyes closed.
4. Observe which parts of the contours are accented with a thicker line. Use the pinpoint of a black or dark grey marker to accentuate those lines. Note that these accentuated lines need to be drawn with the same dynamism as the underlying lines. Otherwise you will ruin your confidently drawn first layer with a thick, crooked contour. If you feel uncertain, use straight, curved, or flexible rulers for these accented lines. Many professionals do.
5. Also trace all the construction lines, otherwise you will only get a simple boring contour instead of a sketch with a meaningful structure. As described in earlier chapters of this book, construction lines give the impression that your drawing is the result of an intelligent design process.
6. In the final sketches you create smooth transitions between white and grey tones. Start with a C1 marker and make sure the whole surface of the blended area is wet with ink. Then you gradually use C2, C3 and C4 markers towards the darker areas. If the whole transition area remains wet while you do the blending, you will get perfect results.



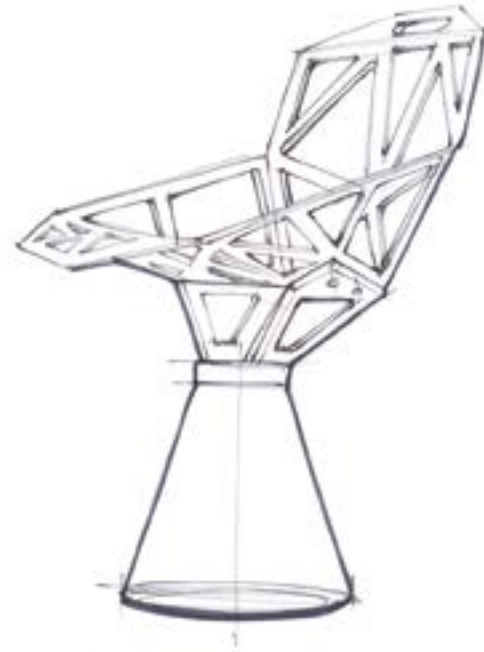
Online tutorials

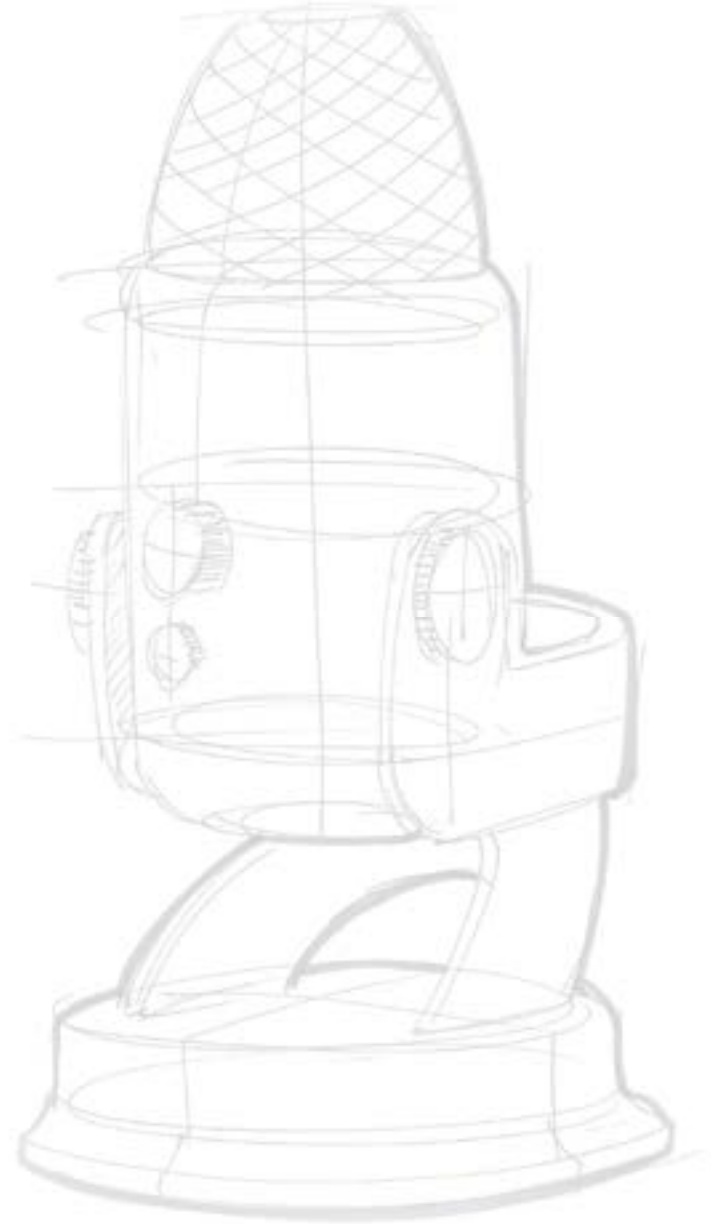
If you would like to enhance your sketching skills, follow the online course with video tutorials based on this book at www.methodofsketching.com

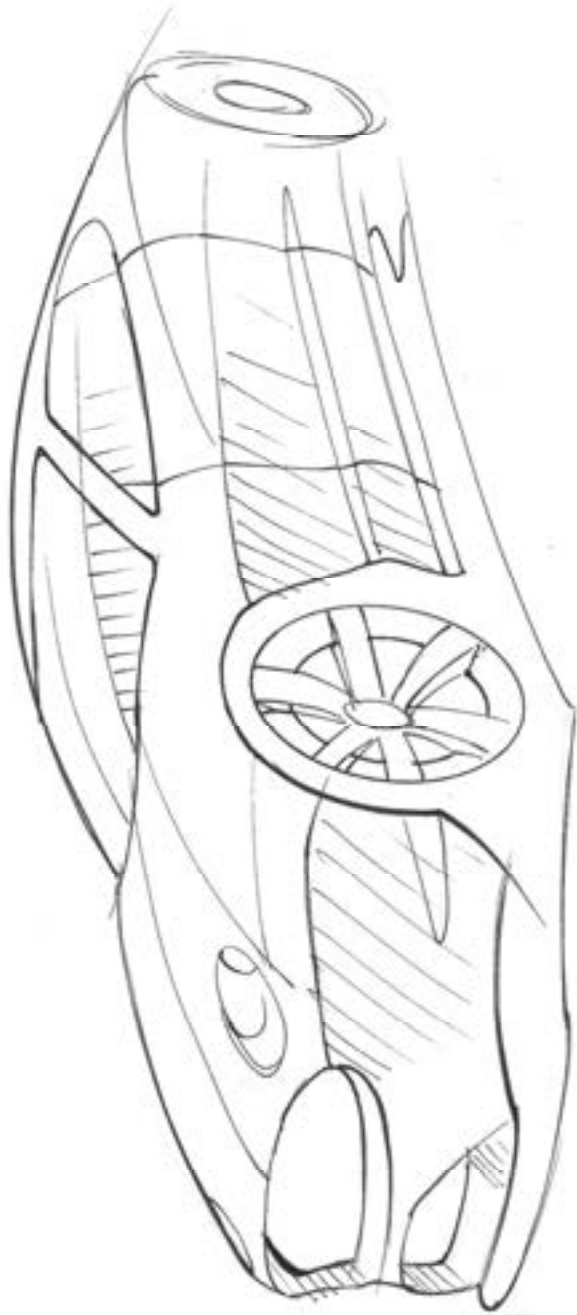
Shading exercise 4



Shading exercise 5







Sketching isn't complicated, it all comes down to confidence.

People who cannot draw well usually believe that sketching is a complex and difficult process. Yet, after reading this book, you'll discover that sketching is more about understanding human reactions to drawing, rather than about possessing any special talent or mastering techniques.

Complex sketches are actually just a structure of very simple, but confidently drawn, segments that are layered on top of one another. Through 15 exercises and integrated, easy-to-follow theory, you'll understand the exceptionally simple theory of sketching, helping you cultivate a skill you never knew you had.



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